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FOR INFORMATION

THE SITUATION BETWEEN IRAQ AND KUWAIT AND UNICEF

1. As of this writing, the desperate situation of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi/Kurdish refugee children and mothers is only the latest phase of a wider human tragedy that has unfolded in the Middle East and North Africa region since the start of the present crisis. Throughout that turbulent period, UNICEF staff and emergency assistance have been at or near the centre of the action.

2. The crisis period - the past nine months - has been a time of unprecedented shock and setback for the vulnerable in the region. From August 1990 to the present, military actions, economic collapse and huge population movements have drastically weakened the protection previously afforded to children and families, particularly, but not exclusively, in Kuwait, Jordan, Yemen and the occupied territories.

3. As the crisis has widened, UNICEF staff have orchestrated their moves with other agencies - the World Health Organization (WHO), the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Oxford Famine Relief Campaign (OXFAM) and Médecins du Monde (Doctors of the World) - to ensure that the onslaught of events does not erase the achievements in infant mortality reduction, immunization coverage and other areas of child survival and development (CSD) that had given these and other Middle East and North African countries a leading role globally. By 25 April 1991, $17 million in UNICEF emergency assistance had flowed into the affected countries. Another $47 million had been called for in global appeals.

4. Among the most recent UNICEF actions in response to the crisis has been the mid-April deployment of a rapid action team to the eastern border of Turkey. The team is channelling vaccines, syringes and oral rehydration salts (ORS) to refugee-staging areas. A week prior to the team's arrival, the

Ankara country office sent children's clothing sets valued at $500,000 to the same area.

5. When the crisis began, the first main challenge faced by UNICEF was the September-November 1990 evacuee migration into Jordan, which saw 850,000 displaced persons, many penniless, pour into that country from the other States of the region at rates of up to 30,000 a day. As the first United Nations agency to deliver assistance, UNICEF provided $4 million to the Government of Jordan over a 15-week period, bringing in essential drugs, vaccines, ORS, tents and blankets, as well as assigning staff to design and construct camps and set up water and sanitation facilities.

6. Along the border of the Islamic Republic of Iran, UNICEF has assisted with midwifery kits, immunization supplies and 50 tons of high-energy biscuits.

7. Towards the end of 1990, clearly deteriorating health conditions in Iraq prompted a $400,000 UNICEF airshipment of children's vaccines and midwifery supplies to Baghdad - the first United Nations assistance to Iraq to that date (14 December). The 5,000 midwifery kits sent at that time were to make a vital difference when hostilities broke out, as the number of home deliveries in Iraq soared to 70 per cent of the country's total number of childbirths.

8. With the start of the war in January 1991, the emergency focus for UNICEF and its sister agencies reverted to Jordan in the expectation that by end-February, up to 1.5 million new evacuees would cross its borders and those of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey. Camps and facilities were prepared and supplies were stockpiled in all four countries for an influx that did not materialize. UNICEF again turned its attention to Iraq and mounted, with WHO, an overland joint assessment mission (16-21 February) that brought in 12 trucks carrying 54 tons of emergency health supplies. Two members of the mission, the UNICEF representative and a senior water engineer, remained in Baghdad to reopen officially the UNICEF office. The mission effectively opened the way for a series of other rapidly organized international relief missions. The first of these, a multi-agency United Nations mission headed by Under-Secretary-General Martti Ahtisaari, used the UNICEF Baghdad office as its support base. The United Nations mission broadened and basically confirmed the conclusion of the WHO/UNICEF mission that Iraq faced a health and food crisis of catastrophic proportions.

9. From the end of February to the present, UNICEF has sent to Iraq some $6 million of assistance - drugs and infusions for the containment of epidemics; immunization supplies and emergency health kits; and chlorine, aluminium sulphate, steel collars and spare parts for the Baghdad water system - and has deployed five international staff to the Baghdad office, making it the only operational United Nations office in Iraq. The joint work of ICRC and UNICEF has made possible the very modest, but crucial, daily supply of clean water that now reaches 70 per cent of Baghdad's population.

10. Kuwait, isolated for the whole of the crisis by occupation, aerial bombardment and military action, received UNICEF assistance immediately after hostilities ended. A four-person UNICEF team, the first United Nations group to reach the country, arrived on 1 March with the special objective of assessing the emotional trauma suffered by children. Later missions provided Kuwait with vaccines and emergency medical kits.

11. Since late March, UNICEF and other agencies have been caught up in actions to meet another Iraq-related challenge - the plight of the refugees who have crossed into the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey. The UNICEF share of those actions, built around the work of the rapid action team at the Turkish border area and the Tehran country office staff, is unfolding as this report is written. Still to be met are the challenges in child protection that will grow from the eventual resettlement of the refugees in their communities in northern Iraq.